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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001517

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)  
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: GOSL APPRECIATES US SUPPORT FOR PEACE  
AND COUNTERTERRORISM

REF: A. COLOMBO 1508 AND PREVIOUS  
[1](#)B. COLOMBO 990

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake for reasons 1.4(b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Ambassador Blake made separate calls on September 14 to Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa and Foreign Secretary Palihakkara to brief them on the September 12 Co-chairs' meeting, encourage Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) attendance at peace negotiations, and discuss cooperation to bring the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) back to the negotiating table. The Ambassador expressed US support to the GOSL in combating LTTE terrorism.

Both Secretaries reiterated that the GOSL seeks international assurance that a cessation of hostilities would not allow the LTTE to strengthen militarily as it has, they argued, since the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement, and expressed the government's readiness to reenter peace talks. They also asked that Norwegian facilitators clarify the LTTE's position on unconditional talks, as LTTE political leader S.P. Tamilselvan had recently made three different statements. The Defense Secretary conceded that the President's alliance with Sinhalese nationalist parties made political steps cumbersome. Secretary Palihakkara contended that public US support of counterterrorism initiatives would strengthen the President's ability to deal with his parliamentary minority. End Summary.

Allies in Counterterrorism  
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[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador Blake called on Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa, brother of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, on September 14 to brief the Secretary on the September 12 Co-chairs' meeting. Ambassador impressed three points upon Defense Secretary Rajapaksa. First, we are committed to tightening conditions on the LTTE to persuade them to pursue a political solution as evident in the recent FBI arrests, our joint PACOM/DoS Maritime Surveillance initiative, and the formation of contact groups to combat LTTE terrorist financing. The Ambassador added that we share the GOSL's concern that the LTTE has used peaceful intervals to build its military capabilities. Second, and in conjunction with "tightening the noose" on the LTTE, the GOSL must put forward

a parallel political strategy. Third, the US believes the current period presents significant opportunity for the GOSL to "govern with statesmanship," stand back from LTTE provocation and cease military engagement, and attend the proposed peace talks in Oslo.

13. (C) The Ambassador noted that the GOSL's early stoicism in the face of repeated LTTE provocations had impressed Washington greatly. Additional Secretary Geetha de Silva, who also participated in the meeting with the Foreign Secretary, added that "between November 15 when the President

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was elected and April 26, not a single bullet was fired." Palihakkara contended that the military's demonstrations of superiority at Sampur and Muhamalai made the ground "ripe for serious talks" because "the LTTE can see that it doesn't have a military option." Secretary Rajapaksa noted that if the LTTE had true control over the minds of the Tamil population, Tamil civilians on the Jaffna Peninsula would have risen up against military troops there during the recent military engagement between security forces and the LTTE.

Southern Parties Stunt President's Pragmatism  
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14. (C) President Rajapaksa faces equal challenges on the parliamentary front. Ambassador Blake expressed hope that the All Parties' Conference (APC) and meetings between the President and Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe of the United National Party could be concluded rapidly and would bear fruit for a political consensus with which the GOSL could offer a national solution to the Tamil people. Defense Secretary Rajapaksa conceded that the President and

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his government "have to think about the Southern people." He said the GOSL had recently released aerial footage of Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) raids on LTTE targets as "a message to the South to calm down." Foreign Secretary Palihakkara added to this argument: "Unlike the LTTE, the GOSL has an electorate here. We need a commitment from (LTTE leader) Prabhakaran that talks will be serious and all hostilities will stop. We can't (politically) afford another Oslo." (Note: In June, peace talks in Oslo failed when the LTTE delegation refused to sit with the GOSL delegation. Ref B). Palihakkara suggested that the President's position would be strengthened if the US publicized more broadly its support for the GOSL's peace and counterterrorism efforts.

15. (C) In a wrap up late in the day, Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar confirmed that he had had constructive meetings with GOSL officials along the same lines as ours. He said the Norwegians hope to meet with the LTTE next week and will spend the interim period talking to the Tigers by phone to prepare the ground for these talks. He also said the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) would meet the LTTE on Friday on more operational matters.

Comment  
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16. (C) Comment: Our principal interlocutors at the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs expressed the GOSL's clear desire to return to negotiations and willingness for the US to play a more active role in facilitating that process through public support of its initiatives to put a viable political solution on the table, to reduce the LTTE's psychological dominance over Tamil civilians, and to marginalize the spoilers of Sinhalese nationalist political parties based in the south. End Comment.

BLAKE